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Additional Comments Sought on Proposed Nutrition & Health Claims Standard

2007

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Report Highlights:

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is nearing completion of its proposed health and nutrition claims standard and is seeking public comment on it once again. Comments must be received by COB (Canberra time) on May 16, 2007.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Introduction

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is nearing completion of its proposed health and nutrition claims standard and is seeking public comment on it once again. **Comments must be received by COB (Canberra time) on May 16, 2007.**

The proposed new standard will put in place a voluntary scheme that will allow manufacturers to promote the health benefits of their products. It will also give consumers more information to help them choose the foods that make up their diet.

Research by FSANZ shows that consumers want simpler information on food labels to assist them to make food choices. The food industry is also seeking to innovate and develop healthier food products.

To be eligible to make health claims foods will need to meet a number of criteria.

The standard provides a rigorous framework to assess claims linking a food to the reduction of risk of a certain disease, for example 'fruit and vegetables reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease'. It also makes nutrition claims - like 'low salt' and 'reduced fat' - legally enforceable.

Comments Sought

FSANZ has already solicited two rounds of public comment and stakeholders have provided information. FSANZ now seeks views on a few items before finalizing the standard.

FSANZ' original proposal was to restrict health claims by setting upper limits for saturated fat, sugar and salt. However, stakeholders advised that this was too simplistic and could preclude some foods, such as large sweet fruits, from making health claims.

FSANZ has now developed a system based on the Food Ministers' policy guidance that takes account of the overall composition of the food, called the nutrient profiling method. This system is based on a UK model and has been tested on over 10,000 Australian and New Zealand food products. The method assesses foods on criteria such as salt, sugar and saturated fat contents but also takes into account other criteria such as fiber, fruit and vegetable content. FSANZ has developed an electronic calculator, available on their website, to allow a quick and simple calculation of whether a food is eligible to carry a health claim.

If a food does not qualify to make a health claim, and a food manufacturer still wants to make a claim, they may be able to reformulate their product with less salt, sugar or saturated fat or by increasing fiber or fruit and vegetable content. For example while some hot chips contain high levels of saturated fat or salt which prevents them from being eligible to make health claims others, such as oven baked frozen chips with low salt and/or reduced fats, could carry claims.

FSANZ are interested in stakeholders' views on this profiling method.

FSANZ has pre-approved a health claim about the link between fruit and vegetable consumption and a reduction in the risk of heart disease. This claim is added to other claims already approved: calcium and osteoporosis or enhanced bone density; sodium and blood pressure; folic acid and neural tube defects; and saturated fats and trans fats and LDL cholesterol levels.

The FSANZ expert advisory group found that there was probable evidence that dietary omega-3 fatty acids reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease but that this did not reach the convincing level required for a high-level health claim. However, a general level health claim, which requires a lesser degree of evidence, will be able to be made, for example 'omega 3s aid heart health'. The expert group also concluded that currently there was not convincing evidence for a relationship between whole grains and cardiovascular disease so FSANZ is not pre-approving a high level claim based on this.

During the last round of public comment FSANZ proposed including a percentage of daily kilojoules on the labels of foods making a nutrition claim such as 'low salt' or 'good source of calcium'. After receiving a mixed response to this suggestion, FSANZ is now undertaking further consumer research and proposing that the percentage daily intake be considered in the broader labeling review being developed this year rather than in this proposal.

Further Information and How to Submit Comments

The preliminary final assessment report for Nutrition, Health and Related claims, including a short guide, is available on the FSANZ website at: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/standardsdevelopment/proposals/proposalp293nutritionhealthandrelatedclaims/index.cfm>. The Nutrient Profiling Calculator is available at: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodmatters/healthnutritionandrelatedclaims/nutrientprofilingcal3499.cfm>.

Comments on this proposed standard may be submitted by any interested party and must be received by FSANZ by COB (Canberra time), May 16, 2007. Details on how to submit comments are also available on the FSANZ website at: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/standardsdevelopment/informationforsubmit1129.cfm>.

The period of public comment closes on 16 May 2007.

Source: FSANZ media release and website

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